NCA
VOC FOR IOP/FN
BACKGROUNDER NO. 1-0545 APRIL 8, 1976
CHARLES WEISS/JERUSALEM

MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS ON WEST BANK

ANNCR:

MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS ARE GOING TO BE HELD MONDAY ON THE OCCUPIED WEST BANK, THE SECOND TIME UNDER ISRAELI ADMINISTRATION. VOA'S CHARLES WEISS HAS THIS BACKGROUND REPORT FROM JERUSALEM.

VOICE:

DESPITE THE VIOLENT CLASHES OF RECENT WEEKS, INTEREST IN THE ELECTIONS IS RUNNING HIGH. VOTER REGISTRATION IS NEARLY THIRTY PERCENT OF THE POPULATION OF THE TWENTY-FOUR TOWNS INCLUDED IN THE POLL. THAT'S EIGHTY-EIGHT THOUSAND VOTERS OUT OF AN ESTIMATED POPULATION OF THREE HUNDRED THOUSAND. SINCE TO QUALIFY A PERSON HAS TO BE A TAXPAYER AND OVER TWENTY-ONE IN A COUNTRY WHERE FAMILIES RUN TO MANY CHILDREN, THE FIGURE OF TWENTY-NINE PERCENT OF THE INHABITANTS WHO TOOK THE TROUBLE TO REGISTER IS QUITE RESPECTABLE.

THE ELECTIONS ARE BEING HELD ACCORDING TO JORDANIAN LAW WITH ONE EXCEPTION. THE ISRAELIS HAVE GIVEN THE FRANCHISE TO WOMEN WHO MEET THE OTHER QUALIFICATIONS. ELECTIONEERING IS LIVELY. ARABIC NEWSPAPERS PUBLISHED IN JERUSALEM ARE FILLED WITH CAMPAIGN ADS. IN RAMALLAH, JUST NORTH OF JERUSALEM, YOUNGSTERS WERE DISTRIBUTING HANDBILLS FOR TWO OF THE SLATES AND A LOUDSPEAKER TRUCK WAS BLARING OUT THE MESSAGE OF ANOTHER. RAMALLAH WAS ONE OF THE TOWNS PUT UNDER CURFEW DURING THE DISTURBANCES ON THE WEST BANK A FEW WEEKS AGO. THEN THE STREETS WERE DESERTED EXCEPT FOR AN OCCASIONAL ARMY PATROL. THIS WEEK IT WAS ITS OLD BUSTLING SELF WITH THE ADDED EXCITEMENT OF THE ELECTION CAMPAIGN.

ACCORDING TO AN ISRAELI ASSESSMENT, THE CANDIDATES BREAK DOWN VERY ROUGHLY INTO THREE CATEGORIES. ABOUT A THIRD ARE CHARACTERIZED AS PALESTINIAN NATIONALISTS OF VARYING DEGREES, AND ANOTHER THIRD IS SUPPORTERS OF KING HUSSEIN. THE REMAINDER ARE ALL NEW FACES IN PUBLIC LIFE THAT THE ISRAELIS ADMIT KNOWING NOTHING ABOUT.

WHILE THE MILITARY GOVERNMENT EMPHASIZES IT HAS NOTHING TO DO WITH RUNNING THE ELECTION, THAT IT'S ALL IN THE HANDS OF THE WEST BANKERS, IT DOES INSIST THAT ELECTIONEERING BE CONFINED TO STRICTLY LOCAL ISSUES. IN THIS IT RELIES ON THE JORDANIAN ELECTION LAW FORBIDDING INCITEMENT. THE ARMY FEELS THE INHABITANTS WANT THE ELECTION AND DOES NOT EXPECT MUCH TROUBLE MONDAY, ALTHOUGH THERE MAY BE ATTEMPTS BY ANTI-ELECTION ELEMENTS TO DO SOMETHING. IN ANY CASE, LOCAL POLICE WILL BE IN CHARGE OF KEEPING ORDER WITH THE ARMY AVAILABLE IF THINGS GET OUT OF HAND.

JS/PY